

THE PRAYER MEETING

SABBATH BLESSINGS.

By Rev. Edward Mack, D. D.

For the week beginning April 15, 1917.

Topic: "Sabbath Blessings." Isaiah 58:5-14.

This chapter of Isaiah was not the product of the exile in Babylon, but was written in Palestine, as was the group of chapters of which it is a part. This is the fact, notwithstanding the confident assertions of modern radical criticism. The incidents of these chapters, and the historical and literary references, clearly indicate Palestine as the scene. In the first part of this fifty-eighth chapter the prophet rebukes the people for a wrong observance of the Day of Atonement. This, the only fast in the Jewish Calendar before the exile, was observed in September, on the tenth day of the first month of the year. The references to the fast of Isa. 58:1-8 suggests the provisions for the Day of Atonement in Lev. 16. The Jews were making this day a mere formality; while "afflicting the soul" and fasting outwardly, they were finding their own pleasure and oppressing their laborers. Such could not be an acceptable day to Jehovah. Rather ought they to seek out and help the poor, to clothe the naked, and break every yoke of injustice and oppression. Such would be a true fast. "If thou bestow on the hungry that which thy soul desireth, and satisfy the afflicted soul: then shall thy light rise in darkness, and thine obscurity be as the noonday . . . and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not."

After this statement of the real grace and meaning of the great national fast, the prophet turns, in the last two verses of the chapter, to appeal for a proper observance of the day of all days, the weekly Sabbath. As in the days of Jeremiah (chapter 17), the Sabbath was then being neglected. They walked in their own ways, and not according to the commandment of God; they were transacting their own business on His day. But if they will turn away their foot from trampling on the holy day, and will call it a delight, then they shall also delight themselves in Jehovah.

Five things are spoken of in these verses: 1. The negative side, to avoid the profanation of the Sabbath: "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, and from doing thy pleasure," "not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking idle words."

2. The positive side of Sabbath observance: "If thou call the Sabbath a delight, and shalt honor it." The day should not be one of fasting, nor of heaviness of spirit, but the best and happiest of the week, "the holy day of Jehovah, honorable." The real spirit of the day is a holy resting from worldly cares, and a happy fellowship with our God and Father.

3. The necessary result of such Sabbath observance will be the highest joys the soul can know: communion with the Heavenly Father and our Saviour. "Then shalt thou delight thyself in Jehovah." It is a sad mistake to suppose that the Sabbath is truly observed and enjoyed in social gatherings and festivities, or athletic exhibitions and indulgences, or even in brutish oversleeping. It is in reality a day of rejoicing in the presence and goodness of the Lord; when we find our highest delight in com-

ing into loving communion with Him, whose sons we are.

4. The blessings of Sabbath observance, while spiritual primarily, are also material. "I will make thee to ride upon the high places of the earth." In the early days of the conquest of Palestine the Israelites were not able to take the high and fortified places, but the old inhabitants held them, in some cases for centuries. Jerusalem was not taken from them until David's day. Those who make the Sabbath a delight will overcome all obstacles and dwell in the heights victoriously. They will also be fed "with the heritage of Jacob," which heritage is not merely the land promised to their father Jacob, but also the spiritual privileges which came from him to them.

5. The guaranty that the blessings will be bestowed is found in the closing words of the passage: "for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." So Moses guaranteed to Hobab a share in the heritage of Jacob: "come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." This is gilt-edge security; there can be no better.

The Sabbath was instituted, not as a day of passive inactivity, nor of dull, slow indolence, but to be a day of positive, active joy. The word means, not "rest," but "cessation"; cessation from one thing to take up another. God ceased from His creative activities to have fellowship with His creatures in the hallowed Sabbath day. The tragedy of Eden was that His children despised and broke away from that fellowship. We cease from the activities of the week days that we may have a day of praiseful fellowship with our Lord, who makes us strong for the week-day privileges, and who redeemed us from our sins. It is a day in which we delight ourselves in the Lord. But one of the tragedies of our modern life is that men are ignoring utterly this real purpose of the Sabbath and are degrading and profaning it by their selfish and sensuous pleasures. Truly, in it we are to cease from the round and grind of the week, to find our highest joy and the renewal of our souls in fellowship with the Lord on His day.

Union Theo. Sem., Richmond, Va.

AN EXPERIENCE IN PRAYER.

It was the last day in the fall term in his senior year in Wesleyan University, in Middletown. Like many others, he was dependent on his own resources for the means to defray the expenses of his college course. Those resources were very small, and were now quite exhausted. He must go forth, as he had done before, and by teaching a school through the approaching winter months earn the needed funds. But where should he go? He had sought with all the means at his command for such an opportunity, but, contrary to all previous experiences, none had appeared. What to do he knew not. But one course seemed open to him, and that was to go back to his father's house in New Hampshire and spend the winter there. But in so doing he would not only lose the next college term, but would also be without means to return to the college in the spring. The thought of this brought only regret and sorrow. In his extremity he saw one resort, and that was prayer. He was no stranger to that resort; more than once in his history "prayer had made the darkening cloud withdraw." In his prayer he said he believed he had been called of God to preach the gospel, and through this college course was seeking preparation for that work. Thus far the Lord had led him on, but he saw not how he could go farther with-

out further leading. If it were the Father's will, he would advance and complete his studies in the University, but if otherwise, he would retreat, however sore a disappointment retreat might be. Then he begged for some token of the Divine will, and promised to follow it wherever it might lead. Rising from his knees, there flashed upon his mind, as in letters of light, the precept, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct thy paths." He had proved that precept true on more than one occasion before. Resting upon it, he lay down and slept soundly until morning. Then, rising up, he repeated his prayer of consecration, trusting that duty's course would somehow appear to him, but seeing no way but to return to his home. One hour, two hours passed, then a step was heard in the hall, and soon there came a knock on the door. Opening it, he saw standing there Professor Lane, one of the faculty of the University.

"Do you know of any student who wants to teach a school this winter?" he asked. "I have an application for a teacher of a high school."

"Yes, Professor," was the eager response. "That is just what I have been praying for."

Handing him a letter, the Professor said: "Look that over and see if it is what you want. If it is, answer it."

It proved to be a call to take charge of a high school in a town not far from Middletown, and the compensation offered would enable the student to complete his course in college. Thus was man's extremity God's opportunity.

"But," says some skeptical objector, "how do you know it was God's opportunity? How do you know that God had anything to do with it? Might not the same things have happened if the young man had not prayed at all?"

In the strictest sense of the word we do not know. This is one of the places where absolute knowledge cannot be claimed. But some things we do know. One is that such events are in perfect harmony with the promises of God. To one at all familiar with those promises that statement needs no proof. The real question at issue here, as it seems to us, is not one of actual knowledge, but one of rational belief. Did the circumstances here furnish ground for such a belief? Look at them. A man in great need and in himself helpless, calling upon God for the thing needed; another man just at this time coming into unsought possession of the very help required—that man turning his steps to the needy one's door, not with any thought of relieving his need, of which he was wholly ignorant, but seeking only to serve others; we claim that in such a conjunction of circumstances belief in the supernatural element in the affair is fully in harmony with the dictates of the soundest reason, and denial of that element is entirely without its realm. We do not know that the relief there sought came in answer to prayer, but to us the belief that it so came is perfectly rational.—Rev. George S. Chadbourne, in *The Christian Advocate*.

We may all do more than we have done,

And not be a whit the worse;

It never was loving that emptied the heart,

Nor giving that emptied the purse.

His name shall endure forever;

His name shall be continued as long as the sun;

And men shall be blessed in him;

All nations shall call him happy.

—Psa. 73:17.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

JESUS ANOINTED AT BETHLEHEM.

April 22, 1917. John 12:1-11.

Golden Text: "She hath done what she could." Mark 14:8.

V. 1. **Bethany** was a small village on the other side of the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem, and about two miles east of the city. This was the home of Mary and Martha, and of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. The Saviour seemed to delight to go there after his trying days in Jerusalem to spend the night with these friends whom he loved so much. It is a joy to us to know that there was at least one home where he could find comfort and peace and sympathy and love.

Lazarus. We studied about his being raised from the dead just two weeks ago.

V. 2. **Made him a supper.** We are told by Matthew and Mark that this supper was given in the house of Simon the leper. No doubt he was one of the lepers that Jesus had healed. Whether there was any connection between the family of Lazarus and that of Simon other than friendship we do not know. Lazarus was among the guests and Martha aided in serving the supper. It was not customary for men and women to eat together on such occasions.

Simon wanted to show his good will to the Saviour and his thankfulness for the healing that had come to him. What more natural than that he should have wanted Lazarus to be there also? A more remarkable trio could scarcely have been gotten together than those three. There was Simon, who had been cleansed from the dreadful disease of leprosy, which was almost a living death. There was Lazarus, who had been dead and had lain in the grave four days, and who was now alive again. And there was the Saviour who had wrought upon these two men those wonderful miracles of his power. We may well believe there was a very strong bond of affection between them.

When two Christians are together in the spirit of friendship, is there not in reality a more remarkable trio present? Wherever Christians are, there the Saviour is also. When two Christians meet the Saviour, we have a more remarkable gathering than that in Bethany. The Christian is one who has been healed of the leprosy of sin and who has been raised to life eternal. Let us show our love to the Saviour by making him a guest in our home and at every meal.

Martha. There are some who seem to think that Mary was more devoted in her love to the Saviour than Martha. That they were different in temperament is very evident. That the one loved more than the other there is no evidence. Mary delighted to sit at his feet and learn gracious lessons from him. Martha showed her love by working for his comfort. When he came to Bethany after the death of Lazarus, it was Martha who first went out to meet him; and she it was who went to bring Mary to him. We have no right to expect all people to show their love in the same way. And we have no right to criticize others because they do not show it in the same way in which we try to show our love.

V. 3. **Mary and her gift.** Mary wanted to show her love to the Saviour in a very special way. She had a vase of very costly sweet-smelling ointment. Judas estimated its value at three hundred pence, or what, in our money, would be equivalent to